DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN W. VELLIQUETTE JR., USA, IRAQI BIOMETRICS MANAGER, COALITION POLICE ASSISTANCE TRAINING TEAM MISSION, VIA TELECONFERENCE FROM IRAQ

TOPIC: THE ROLE OF BIOMETRICS IN THE COUNTERINSURGENCY

MODERATOR:
LIEUTENANT COMMANDER BROOK DEWALT, USN, OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

TIME: 9:01 A.M. EDT

DATE: WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 15, 2007

(Note: Please refer to www.defendamerica.mil for more information.)

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: Hello. I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense Bloggers Roundtable for Wednesday, August 15th, 2007. My name is Lieutenant Commander Brook DeWalt, with the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating the call today.

This afternoon our guest from Iraq is U.S. Army Lieutenant Colonel John Velliquette, assigned as the Iraqi biometrics manager with the Coalition Police Assistance Training Team Mission, or CPATT. The colonel's here today to discuss the roles biometrics played in the counterinsurgency.

And we're pleased to have you as a guest today, sir.

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Thank you.

Good morning, gentlemen.

Q   Good morning.

Q   Good morning.

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: My name is Lieutenant Colonel John Velliquette, and I'm a(n) Army Reservist for 22 years. I graduated from West Point in 1986, served active duty for six years, and then went to the Washington National Guard for nine years and then transitioned over to the Army Reserves in 2001, and here I am today.

I've been in Iraq about three and a half months, on a one-year tour, and when I'm done, I'll transition back to civilian life. I am a Seattle police officer. I've worked there for about eight and a half years. And my current position there is, I do DUI enforcement.

Today I'm going to talk about the biometrics in Iraq, how -- the role biometrics is playing in the counterinsurgency movement, the fight; why and how Iraqis use the Iraqi AFIS, which is the Automated Fingerprint System, and how it has expanded beyond its original intent; and talk about the biometric collection procedures that the Iraqis do to collect the fingerprints.

The Iraqi Automated Fingerprint Identification System is an unclassified identity management system used to record data on Iraqi citizens and persons of interest. It's managed by CPATT, which she said is the Civilian Police Assistance Training Team, and then part of our -- CPATT's mission is to mentor the minister (sic) of Interior, so that it could transition and be a functioning organization on its own.

U.S. contractors currently maintain Iraqi AFIS over at Adnan Palace, which is located in Baghdad within the International Zone. The minister of Interior has a section of latent fingerprinters, fingerprint examiners, that work there. There's 24 of them in all. They work two different shifts, not quite on 24/7 operations. And what they do is, they match latent prints at the site.

Iraqi AFIS has approximately 750,000 records in its database, including approximately 280,000 pre-Saddam era criminal records which were captured prior to coalition forces taking control of the country, and these records were fingerprint cards -- ink fingerprint cards that were scanned into our system.

Currently the minister of Interior has about 300,000 fingerprint records in the system. The minister of Defense, which has all the Iraqi army, about 67,000. And then the various other organizations have the remainder.

The reason why Iraqi AFIS was brought into country was that the minister of Interior made a bunch of hiring decisions initially that were unfortunate, and it became essential to develop a system of biometrically screening for identification of the employees it hired and also for law enforcement purposes. So what happened in conjunction with the Iraqi government, the U.S. purchased an Automated Fingerprinted Identification System and brought it over to Iraq in February of 2005, and we've had U.S. contractors working with the system, training the Iraqis how to operate the system, how to maintain it ever since then, and this contract ends next July of '08. And we hope that this time that the Iraqis can take over this system themselves.

Also in August of 2004, we started collected biometric data from employees, of the Iraqi police, of the minister of Interior initially, and that program's expanded to more than its initial intent. The minister of Defense has joined in and collecting biometrics from the Iraqi army. The minister of

Justice collects biometrics as it screens its prison guards. The minister of Justice also collects biometrics on the prisoners and detainees it currently has in its system so that when prisoners see an investigative judge, that judge has that person's criminal history to take in consideration.

We also accept laten prints from crime scenes throughout the country. They include murder scenes, other type of crimes that occur, and they come from various sources from the Iraqi police as well as different agencies from the U.S. here in country that we assist.

The Iraqis' biometric collection process -- typically the minister of Interior will send out a team of five civilian employees who take a jump kit, which consists of a Panasonic Toughbook Computer and a Livescan fingerprint scanner as well as a camera, and they take data from the person, biographical data. They take the prints from the person, and it's 10 prints, and they take two or three pictures as well as iris scan. That information is saved in the Panasonic Toughbook. And because of connectivity problems over here, the information is burned onto a CD, taken over to Adnan Palace; that information on the CD is entered in Iraqi AFIS and those names are checked against existing records in the system.

In most cases, there will be no hits. The person will come back clear. A lot -- we will get criminal hits; we get 10 to 20 a week from the minister of Interior. And there's also identification hits where a person may have had his fingerprints entered previously from, for instance, the minister of Defense or a different minister; that person might be holding two jobs or may have quit and went to work for a different ministry.

We also weed out ghost employees through this process, too, people who collect two paychecks but actually only work one job. The program's very successful. It's one of the true successes here in Iraq.

And I'm ready to take your questions, gentlemen.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: That's great. Thank you very much, sir.

At this point, if we want to go ahead and start with Noah Shachtman.

Q   Hey, Colonel, thanks for doing this. It's Noah Shachtman with Wired magazine.

A couple questions, or couple-part questions. Besides the picture and the iris and the fingerprints, what other information is tied to this biometric? That's part one.

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Well, when you take the person's biometrics, you have them bring in their jensea (ph) card, which is the Iraqi national identification card. It's not really an advanced card, but it's the information from which they start. Essentially what we're doing is we're assigning fingerprints of this person's identity, his name on the jensea (ph) card. So all that information off the jensea card (ph) -- his name, all the travel names, father's name, mother's name -- is all entered into the database. And the database is, I must add, is both in English and Arabic. And it takes his address, other personal biographical information, his height, weight, hair color --

Q   Date of birth, religion, that kind of stuff?

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Exactly. Well, no, I'm not so sure about the religion part.

Q   But certainly the tribal -- I mean the tribal information maps to the religion, right?

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: It could. It could. You know, the MOI is taking great pains not to make a big deal as far as what religion they are, whether it's Sunni or Shi'ite. They're very conscious about that. So to my knowledge, they don't -- that information's not put on a database. This database, I must add, is also very sensitive, because essentially what it becomes is a hit list if it gets in the wrong hands. You know, some sectors are entirely Sunni, some are entirely Shi'ite, so we make take great pains to make sure this database stays in the proper hands.

Q   And then part two is, my understanding was that in addition to the efforts that you're performing, also a number of local commanders are also sort of collecting biometrics in their own AOs. Is there any attempt to bring that sort of piecemeal biometric together? And, you know, does the commander in the field have access to your sort of central database?

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Yes. The three -- the other two systems that you're talking about in country are the Biometric Automated Tool Set, which is a coalition force protection system. It has a secret component, on the high side, and also there's the Biometric Identification System for Access, which is used for base access.

For instance, to get into the International Zone, you would have to go through that system.

All three systems are actually tied together through the Biometrics Fusion Center in West Virginia. And the BAT system is used out in the field by local commanders for force protection issues mainly. A local commander out in the field will not have access to the Iraqi database generally, just because there are no current systems set up in place to do that.

Q   So just to be clear then, I mean, doesn't all -- if someone wants to evade that system, all they have to do is move from one town to the other, because a commander in one town won't have the information that a commander in the other town won't.

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Well, part of the purpose of Iraqi AFIS is, particularly for the minister of interior, is once we collect data on the Iraqi police for instance, they're issued a minister of interior identification card. And that card has a specific number that's generated from when they have the biometrics taken. The card is printed in one side on English, the other side in Arabic. That's why we have the English-Arabic interface on the Toughbook computers. So if the Iraqi policeman has that card, then they know he's been properly vetted.

Now I think what you're asking is, the purpose of Iraqi AFIS is not to collect biometrics on everybody in the country -- just the minister of interior employees, minister of defense employees, minister of justice. So the local commander -- you know, if he has concern for -- somebody out in his area of operations will collect biometrics using the BAT system on that person.

Q   And it -- but just to be clear if I may, if I have a BAT system in Fallujah and I have somebody entered into my system and that person moves to Baghdad, you know, there's no way to track that person from Fallujah to Baghdad. Or there's no -- the system in Baghdad won't also have that information.

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Are you talking about Iraqi AFIS?

Q   I'm talking about a commander in the field takes a fingerprint of a insurgent suspect in Fallujah. Let's say that guy shows up again in Baghdad. Will there be any biometric information about that person?

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Well, if he collected biometric information from that person in Fallujah, then it's in the system at the Biometrics Fusion Center in West Virginia. So if he's detained for whatever reason in Baghdad, and hopefully if he's a insurgent suspect, hopefully he's not still loose.

Q   Right.

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: But if he's contacted again in Baghdad then yes, it is possible to find out if he's in the system.

Q   Colonel, it's Gerry Gilmore with American Forces Press Service.

As a policeman and also as an officer, a U.S. military officer, why is this so important, having such an ID system? Why is this so important to establishing a stable, peaceful society in Iraq?

How does it contribute to that and what aspect, in your words?

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Well, as far as the identification system, weapons are abundant in Iraq. You know, Iraqis are allowed to own in a weapon in their house, but they're not allowed to carry one from point a to point b. So the Iraqi police who are issued Glocks have a particular problem if they don't have identification cards. If they're stopped at a coalition checkpoint and they don't have their identification card, the weapon will be confiscated. If they're stopped at another type of Iraqi checkpoint, they may take that weapon, too. This all depends on whether or not they have their identification cards. So as far as the minister of Interior is concerned, having that identification card is very important.

The answer to the second part of your question is people want to have confidence in their police. So we know that there are criminals out there from the 280,000 that Saddam let loose. We identify them every week, and you know, their criminal records are sent over to the minister of Interior internal affairs for investigation, so you know, the Iraqi people need to have confidence in their police, and we know that there's insurgents, criminals that are actively participating (in policing ?) activity. So that's how Iraqi AFIS helps weed those people out of the system.

Q   And the other part is, of course, with the Iraqi government employees and so forth that are working with coalition forces, a security aspect as well for us, right?

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Well, for the Iraqi government employees, for instance, that work in the international zone, they are biometrically screened through the biometric identification system for access, which still ties back into the Biometric Fusion Center in West Virginia. Most of the government

employees -- you know, for instance, for the minister of Interior -- have been biometrically screened. So they've had it either one way or the other in most cases.

Q   And these things can't be counterfeited, right?

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Fingerprints? Oh, no.

Q   Well, the whole -- I mean, that's the whole point, right, is a unique identifier. So --

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Yes.

Q   You're carrying this card and you check everything out. You basically -- that's who you are, right?

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: As far as the ID, identification cards, yes. The minister of Interior's card, for instance, is not a Smart Card yet. We are working with them for a solution that gives them a Smart Card for identification purposes, but that's not yet in place.

Q   Okay. Thank you, sir.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: David Axe.

Q   Hi. It's David Axe, Aviation Week Group. I understand the previous -- or maybe some of the existing biometric systems had problems with reliability being too -- some of the scanners and portable equipment that folks carry around have had problems with being too fragile. Are we solving this problem?

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: I can only speak for the jump kits that we have that we use for collecting biometric data for Iraqi AFIS. The Panasonic Toughbook computers, and out of the 650 jump kits we have in country, there's probably been just a handful of failures. In the computers in this very rugged, hot environment, you know, it's very dusty and they -- things get dropped occasionally. The scanners, out of 650, probably no more than a dozen have had issues as far as working. So the equipment's very durable, it works, and we've been happy with it.

Q   Do you have any examples of abuse of this system by Iraqis?

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: To my knowledge, I don't have any examples of that type of abuse. There's been an occasion where a team's been collecting biometrics from Iraqi police and they've tried to give them the wrong rank.

I've been very impressed with the biometric collectors that the minister of Interior has. These employees have very high moral standards. They want to do the right thing. And this particular group of employees was all hired locally from Baghdad, and that's why they're sent out in different parts of the country, just to prevent that type of situation from occurring, where a bribe might take place to use somebody else's fingerprints when entering the information. So to my knowledge, that has not occurred.

Q   What about training for the collection teams? Has it been a challenge getting Iraqis up to speed on this system?

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: There's been some training challenges, yes. The contractors that oversee the Iraqi AFIS system also train on the jump kits. That's a two-day training course. And collecting fingerprints is an art; you know, you have to do it right, so sometimes the quality of prints may not be the best. And when we get the records into the system, we can identify which jump kit that the poor quality prints came from so we can go back and contact that operator and give him some retraining.

The system also allows you to override a print if it's bad, and there's been occasions where that's been done. But the more that we can go back and take the prints from that person again and enter it in the system, then the AFIS system will accept a better print.

Q   Okay. Thank you very much.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: Thank you. And, Sean Meade, do you have any questions at this time?

Q   Yes, I do. Sir, I'm also with Aviation Week Group, and I wanted to follow up on David's question for just a minute by asking, did the Panasonic system have any way of telling the person who's taking the prints whether or not they've taken a good print?

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Yes. It gives you immediate feedback. If there's something wrong with the quality of print that the person takes, it'll say retake your print again or it'll tell the operator exactly what's wrong with the print that was obtained.

Q   Okay. But you still get some bad prints that come back to be filed in the system?

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: It happens, yes. And it's usually a(n) operator issue. Besides the minister of Interior employees, we've trained people from the minister of Defense, the minister of Justice.

So the issues have come from different areas, different ministries, as far as the collection procedures go.

Q   And then a different question I wanted to ask you briefly is just if you have any biometric experience back in your job back in the States, you know, with the Seattle Police Department, and how that -- if you do, how that biometric experience compares with what you're doing in Iraq.

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Well, I worked control for five years in Seattle, so I was on the other end of the biometric experience, collecting evidence, collecting latent prints at crime scenes. So I know how to dust a print, capture it, and I have some training in then determining on whether it's a good print or not. So I have experience on that end. As far as the latent print examiners, no, no prior experience in that.

Q   (Off mike.) Thank you.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: Great. Thank you very much.

We probably have time for about one more question, if anybody has a follow-up.

Q   Yeah, I do. It's Noah Shachtman.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: Go right ahead.

Q   How many people do you figure have access to the main database? And how do you limit that access?

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Well, currently only the 24 minister of Interior employees, working over at Adnan Palace, have access to the database, as well as the contractors.

Q   And how many contractors are we talking about?

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Currently there are seven American contractors.

Q   But then certainly there's got to be guys within the military that have access to this. It's not just the 24 and the seven, right?

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Well, remember, the database is also at the Biometric Fusion Center in West Virginia. So I think that should answer your question there. (Chuckles.)

Q   Got it.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: Fantastic. Thank you all. We've had some great questions and comments today. And as we wrap up the call, I'd like to ask the colonel if he has any final comments.

LT. COL. VELLIQUETTE: Yeah. I'd just like to say Iraqi AFIS is a tremendous success over here. We increase the database by 4(,000) or 5,000 each week. We identify previous criminals. We identify suspects in crimes. And it's a system that's working, and hopefully it's going to be improved even more here in the future shortly.

Thank you, gentlemen.

Q   Thank you.

LT. CMDR. DEWALT: Thank you very much, Colonel.

Today's program will be available online at the Bloggers Roundtable link at www.defendamerica.mil, where you can access a story from American Forces Press Service based on today's call, along with source documents, such as the audio files, transcripts, biographies, et cetera.

If there are any questions about the program, please contract the Department of Defense New Media Team at 703-325-0103 or bloggeroutreach@hq.afis.osd.mil.

Again, thank you, Colonel Velliquette and our blogger participants. This concludes today's event, and feel free to disconnect at any time. Thank you.
####
(r)FC‾END
(r)FL‾